

Women ONLY police stations: Making it
uncomplicated for reporting Domestic and Family
violence

A policy submission



Lynda Wilson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

QUT acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara, as the traditional First Nations owners of the land where QUT stands. We pay respect to the Elders, lore, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning.

QUT acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the QUT community.

“Domestic violence has a long past but a short history”
(Erez, 2002)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this policy proposal, we will be stating the need of establishing women only police stations. Studies show, 1 in 6 Australian women experience Domestic Violence, whereas it is 1 in 16 men who are victims of DV. Nowadays police stations are becoming monuments in terms of DV. There is still social injustice prevailing in the society such as gender inequality. Based on this, some police stations are not bothered in to take action against perpetrators of DV. This shows the urgency of implementing new policies to put a stop to this social injustice. Over the years, there was much support against DV but the rate of domestic violence is still increasing day by day. Among women, some categories of women are more vulnerable to DV. They are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, young women, pregnant women, women with disabilities as well as those women experiencing financial hardships.

As a social worker it is the responsibility to formulate the best policy for the society, we live in. This has brought us to the conclusion that *'Women ONLY police stations'* would be a great initiative because of many reasons:

- Women can safely reach out for their rights.
- A woman can feel comfortable reporting to another woman.
- Another woman can understand the pain and suffering that a woman is going through.
- They can feel supportive as well.

Overall, these will help the community to reduce family violence to a greater extent making it uncomplicated for women to report Domestic Violence.

Based on this policy design, we formulated some recommendations which are mainly focussing on assigning police officers especially women police officers who are trained for dealing clients with disabilities, including women police officers who are Indigenous Australians. We also draw attention to the importance of social workers who are specialised in Domestic Violence to assist police officers in dealing with clients.

INTRODUCTION

Women victims of Domestic and Family Violence who stayed with their partner have reported having lifelong health issues (Walsh, 2019). The main objective of this policy submission is for women only police stations in Queensland, this would make it easier for the women victims of Domestic Violence to report it to authorities. It is significant in the current situation since the recent incident that happened on Gold Coast. This goes to show that there an importance for my policy submission, this is in order to avoid negligence from the police. My policy submission mainly covers the importance of assigning trained officers in Domestic and Family Violence, especially officers trained for dealing with clients with disabilities as well as Indigenous Australians. Bringing this into practice would hopefully end the negligence towards Domestic and Family Violence victims/survivors so that we can save the life of women against those who want to hurt them.

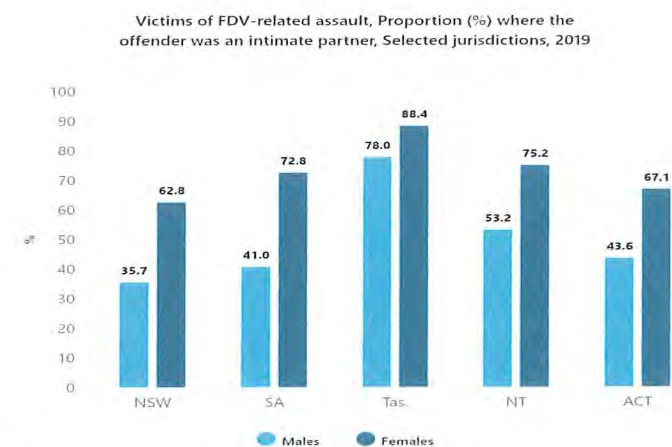
STATISTICS

The graph from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) shows that 30% of reported cases of homicide were related to Domestic and Family Violence which totals 125 victims.

Out of those 125 victims, 80 were females. It also found that in most of the cases that occurred inside the home. Knives were found to be the commonly used weapon in most those cases 74 victims were charged with murder (ABS,2019).

Out of five recorded cases of assaults, two were related to Domestic and Family Violence in 2019. Victims of DFV showed

an increased rate from 2018 to 2019 in most of the jurisdictions like New South Wales (4%), Western Australia and South Australia (10%), Tasmania (7%) and Australian Capital Territory (12%). Only Northern Territory showed a decline to 8%. Additionally, about two thirds were victims of Domestic and Family Violence relating to assaults of female and where the offender was an intimate partner.



BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA ' S MODEL OF WOMEN ONLY POLICE STATIONS

Women only police stations in Argentina were established in 1988 to combat Domestic and Family Violence. As a result, there are a total of 128 of specialist police stations in Buenos Aires, they employ more than 2300 officers in interdisciplinary teams. Queensland University of Technology Professor Kerry Carrington from the Centre for Justice believes that the same method should be implemented in Queensland and feels that *"we're going backwards, we're not going forwards - we really need to do something different"*. (Riddick, 2021).

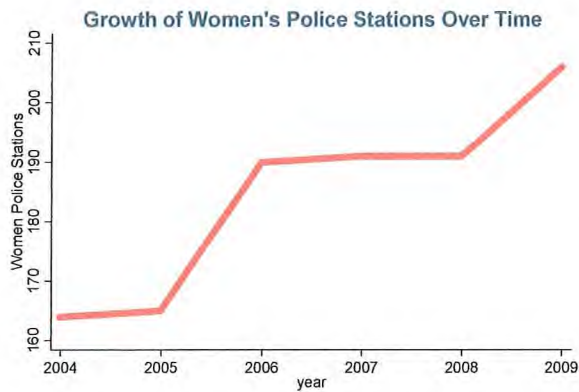
Station	Physical Violence	Psychological Violence	Sexual Abuse	Symbolic Violence	Economic Violence	Internet Abuse
A	13	7	4	3	9	8
B	9	9	0	9	7	7
C	11	11	1	7	7	4
D	6	4	2	0	4	0
E	8	7	4	3	4	0
F	12	12	4	0	8	0
G	12	12	12	4	6	2
H	9	9	8	3	5	4
I	8	8	7	0	3	0
J	8	6	8	0	8	0
Total	96	85	50	29	61	25

What types of violence are reported most frequently - Table 1
(Carrington, Guala, Puyol & Sozzo, 2020)

Argentina's police officers operate from a gender standpoint and officers are especially trained to respond to Domestic and Family Violence. Stations look nothing like a traditional police station with mostly painted brightly to receive victims, they don't have holding cells either. They employ not only police officers but social workers, lawyers, psychologists, and counsellors who all work together with a female victim as well as working with other organisations such as local government and other organisations.

The table *'What types of violence are reported most frequently'* (Carrington, Guala, Puyol & Sozzo, 2020) above shows that Physical and Domestic Violence was the most form of which women only police stations are needed and responded to however there were complaints of sexual assault and abuse on the internet.

In the paper “*Women’s Police Stations and Domestic Violence: Evidence from Brazil*” by Elizaveta



Perova and Sarah Reynolds (2015) Women ONLY police stations have been implemented in Bolivia, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Kosovo, Liberia, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda and Uruguay. Within Latin America, since 2009 Brazil has the largest operation with almost 500 stations.

(Perova & Reynolds, 2015)

Delegacias Especializadas de Atendimento à Mulher (DEAMs) simply translated to mean “*specialised police service for women*” (Perova & Reynolds, 2015) comprises part of Civil police and the crimes they concentrate most on are rape and Domestic and Family Violence. The graph above explains how Women ONLY police stations have expanded since the year 2000 and by 2009 DEAMs had been formed in just 500 municipalities (out of 5564 in Brazil) where most of the population live.

FACEBOOK POLL RESULT

After taking a poll on the Domestic Violence Information Library (Australia) Facebook group on the 11 May 2021 I found that although Women ONLY police stations are a good idea, some survivors described how when they went to a police station or rang the police officer they were faced with ridicule and demeaning behaviour from female officers as well as some from Male police officers (See Impact Statements).

This could be because training isn’t dedicated to Domestic and family Violence alone or understanding the of the issue from both female and male police officers to make it a change in the law about Domestic and Family Violence.

Added by [redacted] DV specialist trained officers Male or female	191 votes
Added by [redacted] Good idea.	138 votes
Added by you: No	25 votes
Added by you: Yes	14 votes
Added by [redacted] Female-only trained DV Police Officers, specialising in Victimology and Coercive Control	4 votes

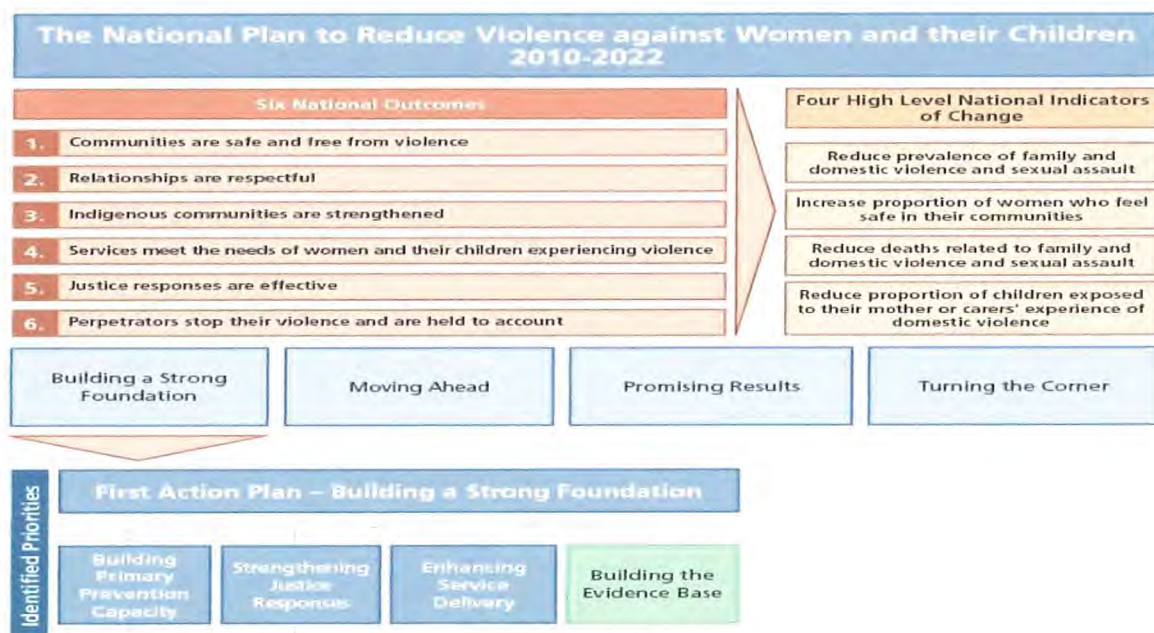
TRAINING FOR POLICE OFFICERS

As my Facebook poll found victims were treated badly from both male and female police officers who lacked empathy, sympathy making them feel like they were the ones who did the abuse or feelings of being victimised over again. Therefore, as mentioned in Recommendation 2, training police officers to appropriately react to Domestic and Family Violence when they are called by victims or least have a Social Worker present when questioning them.

The Director of Gold Coast based Domestic Violence Prevention Centre said, in an online article that *"Women feel safer to talk to an advocate working with them and liaising with police - they feel that they are being heard and the police will respond more appropriately."* (Riddick, 2021).

Queensland only employs 90 police officers for Domestic and Family Violence despite more than 100,000 a year in the whole state. One program incorporated 'high risk' teams but steered by non-government organisations across the state of Queensland and they are meant to recognise instances of Domestic Violence abuse where victims may be in imminent or serious danger (Smee, 2021).

The image below explains how the Government plans to reduce violence against women in Domestic and Family Violence and they hope it will be achieved by the 2022. If we had women ONLY police stations, then this plan may just work. This will help with the inequalities due to the power of patriarchy and unequal rights of gender-based ideologies.



(ABS, 2013)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIA ' S INDIGENOUS POPULATION

Domestic and Family Violence is a serious problem among Indigenous Australians. It can be seen in the context of colonisation, disadvantage, oppression and marginalisation. The causes of violence in Indigenous communities are as follows:

- Precipitating causes- a preceding factor that can trigger a perpetrator.
- Situational factors- conditions in the social context.
- Underlying factors- historical factors which make them vulnerable.

(Al-Yaman, Van Doeland, & Wallis, 2006)

The dispossession of land and cultural dispossessions have been affecting the social, economic, physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australians that resulted in violence among the community. Colonisation paved way to intergenerational trauma among Australia's Indigenous population that includes cultural genocide, racism, removal of land rights, stolen generation etc. *"As the physical trauma and violence were inflicted within the community as part of colonisation, they themselves became a cause of violence"* (Al-Yaman, Van Doeland, & Wallis, 2006).

There are many Indigenous Australians that do not report Domestic and Family Violence because they are faced with discrimination, racism as well as a lack of understanding from support services including the police (Better Health Channel, 2017). This leads to consequences of people living in hardship and keeps them in the violent settings where they have no choice but to stay in their situations.

Those that do appear at police stations can be arrested or not believed. This is why it is important that there is a woman ONLY police station in their own community, then they can be seen at the police station by an Indigenous Australian female police officer who would be more understanding about their culture than a non-Indigenous police officer (see Recommendation 4).

Some Indigenous Australian community have safe houses where they can receive short term accommodation for both women and children to escape the violence at home. When they are living there then they are able to decide if they want to report the violence.

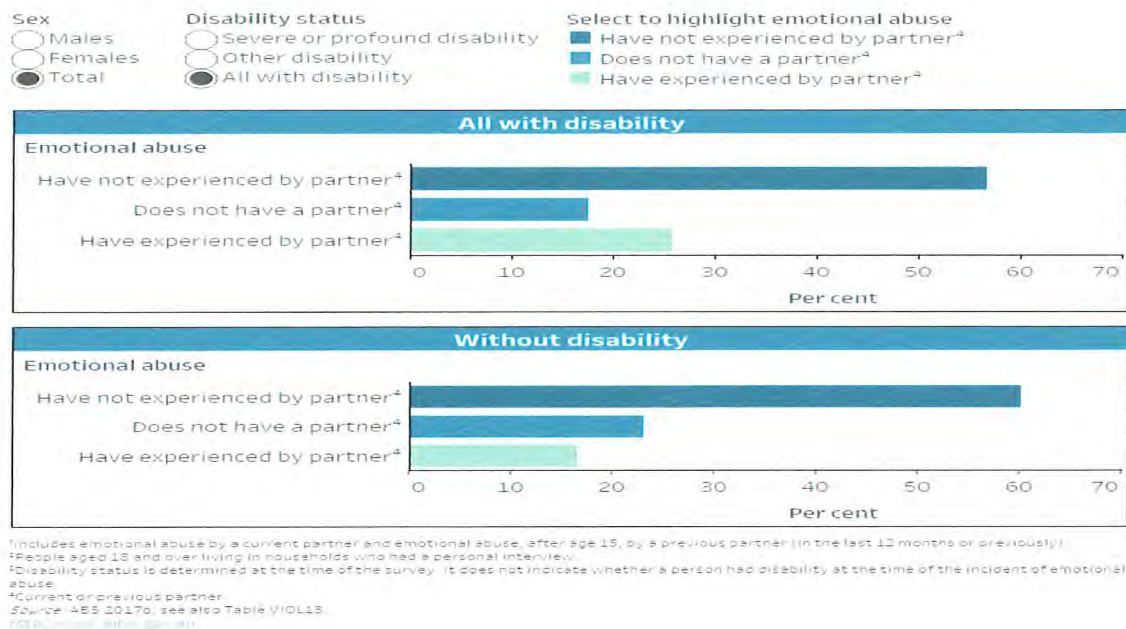
DISABILITY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic Violence does not only affect women who do not have a disability but those that do, is often much worse than women that are not.

The kinds of Domestic Violence that they suffer can consist of:

- Hitting, choked, kicked and being burnt by cigarettes
- Threatening them to be physical with them or the treat of institutionalisation
- Threatening their pets, children or if blind their guide dogs
- Criticisms and put downs and insulting them
- Keeping control of their disability aids such as moving her wheelchair around or not within reach or they destroy them
- Refusing to wash or feed them or not give them their medication

Those women with disabilities who experience Domestic Violence compared to those who don't have a disability are likely to suffer Domestic Violence for a more extended time. There are a lot of reasons for this and could include social myths, lack of sex education and dependence on the abuser etc (Better Health, 2014).



(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020)

The above image shows the prevalence of emotional abuse for adults by disability status and sex

- 1 in 4 (26% or 1.5 million) adults with disability, compared with 1 in 6 (17% or 2.1 million) adults without disability
- 1 in 3 (32% or 929,000) women with disability, compared with 19% (or 1.2 million)
- 1 in 5 (20% or 556,000) men with disability, compared with 14% (or 876,000). Australian (Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020).

Women who are victims of Domestic and Family Violence face barriers when getting help and Services that deal with DFV may not be educated about issues facing with women with disabilities, disability workers may not be educated about Domestic and Family violence. Those agencies don't cross reference as thoroughly as they should be which in turn creates gaps in available services. For example, *"a woman might be referred back and forth between two agencies, such as sexual assault services and disability services, without receiving help from either because she falls outside the guidelines of both agencies"* (Better Health Channel, 2014). Additionally, studies and statistics about women with disabilities and Domestic and Family Violence are not easily available for policy makers to do anything about the violence that is happening.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The below recommendations are needed urgently from the Government to prevent ongoing hardship for victims that are the most vulnerable in Queensland and Australia. As a Social Worker it is from this position that I make the following 4 recommendations.

Recommendation 1:

Police Stations based on the Brazil and Argentina models (see submission body) but where it is a one stop station with police, doctors, lawyers, psychologists, and community services all on site. Including trained workers to care for children while the victim/survivor speak to the staff.

Recommendation 2:

All officers are to be DV trained which is mandatory. Interview traumatised Domestic and Family Violence victims with respect and trauma understanding. Have a specialist Domestic and Family Violence social worker to attend DFV call outs to advocate for already stressed and vulnerable.

Recommendation 3:

Specialised female police officers to be trained for clients with Disabilities as they are mostly ignored in mainstream Domestic and Family Violence situations.

Recommendation 4:

Women Indigenous Australian Domestic and Family Violence police officers at every police station dealing with Indigenous Australian victims of Domestic Violence.

IMPACT STATEMENTS

The impact statements below are from women in the Domestic Violence Library (Australia) Facebook group, and these are just some of the 96 comments on the Facebook Poll that was taken about the question "Women ONLY police stations" they are grouped by Female and Male Police Officers reaction to women reporting their perpetrator/attacker.

Female Officers reaction to victims (This is where Recommendation 2 comes into submission)

Miss K

I went to the local police station for help with an IVO and the female constable would not let me see a DV officer and rang my ex to tell him I was the station. She has had absolutely no understanding about my experience and has not kept me up to date about hearings etc.

Miss T

It was a female 'DV specialist' who cast doubt over my story. She said, 'it seems like a normal breakup', then proceeded to tell me about her own problems with her ex. Ex in my case is a potential killer - a psychopath.

Miss G

The alleged DV specialist policewoman I reported to had absolutely no understanding, no compassion, no empathy, she ran her own agenda, and I was merely a convenient tool.

I was absolutely let down by her.



Male Officers reactions to DV victims (This is where Recommendation 2 comes into submission)

Miss MN

The first responders (one male/one female) said it was his word against mine. (Yeah, I split the back of my head open myself.) As they were leaving, the male police officer muttered (but loud enough for me to hear, "What an attention seeker." to the female police officer. My sister took me down to the local police station to speak to them because she was unhappy about all of this. The nice male officer said I needed to speak to the female officer. She walked out and said, "Ughhh, I haven't got time to deal with this. Tell her to go to in the city." and then she stomped off.

Miss S

I had to give great detail into exact wording that my ex used every time there were 'sexual relations', to a male younger than me... It was so humiliating and awful. I was with him in a room for 12 hours giving my statement. I would have preferred anybody else to be honest!!

CONCLUSION

In this policy proposal, I drew attention to the importance of Women ONLY police stations, by discussing the types of domestic violence, asking opinions from victims through a Facebook poll. As well as about the violence among Indigenous population and Women with disability. Based on this we formulated 4 recommendations as described in this submission.

There is an initiative going around in Queensland to produce and share efforts to reduce Domestic and Family Violence (Murray & Powell, 2011). Australian states and territories share a common ground and action towards Domestic and Family Violence (Murray & Powell, 2011).

All the policies focus on the 'victim safety' more than anything. But then, there are cases where women found it difficult to report the cases to the police. We believe Women ONLY police stations with trained women police officers can be an initiative to tackle this issue.

There is an urgency towards finding a situation to Domestic and Family Violence so that we can all prevent the suffering and hardship of victims and survivors. Therefore, I urge the minister to adopt the recommendations in this policy submission immediately for tabling in parliament.



Women-only police stations in Buenos Aires are brightly coloured and have play areas for children.
(Photo supplied by Kerry Carrington, found in Riddick, 2021)

No real names have been used in this submission

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